



United States Forest
Department of Service
Agriculture

Ozark-St. Francis National
ForestSt. Francis Ranger
District

2955 Highway 44
MariannaAR72360
870-295-5278870-295-3382

File Code: 1950

Date: July 10, 2019

Dear Interested Party:

The Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the *St. Francis National Forest Ecosystem Restoration Project* is available for review and comment. A hardcopy of the EA is available upon request. This project is an activity implementing the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests Revised Land and Resources Management Plan (https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsm8_042809.pdf) and is subject to the pre-decisional objection process at 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-08-08/html/2012-19302.htm>).

The project area is comprised of approximately 22, 675 acres of National Forest System lands within Lee and Phillips Counties, AR. The Proposed Action has been identified as the preferred alternative. The purpose of this project is to move the species composition, structure, and density of the St. Francis National Forest's major hardwood communities and associated native terrestrial and riparian vegetation communities closer to the desired conditions outlined in the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests Revised Land and Resources Management Plan. This action is needed to 1) improve resilience against environmental stressors in mature and overstocked stands; 2) arrest the trend toward conversion from oak dominance to shade tolerant, non-mast bearing species, and 3) control the spread of invasive plant infestations.

To meet project objectives, activities would be prescribed and implemented after inventory and survey and, if required, additional consultation. Activities may include harvests, chemical site preparation, reforestation, timber stand improvements, prescribed burning, mechanical fuels treatments, wildlife stand improvements, wildlife opening management actions, herbicide applications to treat invasive plant infestations, planting site appropriate vegetation, erosion repair activities, purchaser road maintenance and road reconstruction. The project includes Adaptive Management components (36 CFR 220.3) to address uncertainties regarding the most effective prescriptions to successfully 1) establish regeneration of oak and other native hardwood canopy species and, 2) restore native species composition where altered or displaced on high quality sites. Non-ground disturbing activities that are administrative in nature are also proposed to identify seed collection areas and ensure that roads in Ozark-St. Francis National Forests' databases more closely align with actual use. Administrative actions proposed would also include elimination of existing wildlife openings within one-half mile of the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. Information regarding annual implementation thresholds, impact thresholds, and other design elements are described in the EA.



Only those who submit timely and specific written comments as defined by §218.2 regarding the proposed project or activity during a public comment period established by the Responsible Official are eligible to file an objection. A 30-day designated opportunity to comment will begin following publication of a legal notice in *The Helena-West Helena World*, Helena-West Helena, AR. The publication date of the legal notice in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to submit written comments on a proposed project or activity. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure that their comments are received in a timely manner.

Specific written comments should be within the scope of the Proposed Action, have a direct relationship to what is proposed, and include supporting reasons for me, as the decision-maker, to consider (§218.2). For organizations, a signature or other means of identification verification must be provided for the individual authorized to represent your organization. Please provide a.) your name and mailing address; b.) the project title: *The St. Francis National Forest Ecosystem Restoration Project*; c.) your comments, and d.) your signature or other means of identification verification. Though not required, it would be most helpful if you also provide a day-time telephone number as I may want to speak with you directly regarding your comment. Written comments can be submitted 1.) by mail; 2.) electronically; 3.) in person, or 4.) by facsimile (fax).

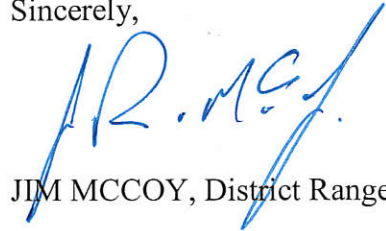
1. Mail written comments to me: Jim McCoy, District Ranger, Sylamore-St. Francis Ranger District, St. Francis National Forest Ecosystem Restoration Project, 1001 East Main Street, Mountain View, AR 72560.
2. Submit electronic comments online at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=36532> or by email at comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-stfrancis@fs.fed.us.
 - a. E-mailed comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc, .docx).
 - b. Please state "*Ecosystem Restoration Project*" in the subject line when providing electronic comments.
3. Written comments delivered in person must be made during office hours at either the Sylamore Ranger District office in Mountain View, AR or the St. Francis District office which is co-located with the Mississippi River State Park Visitor Information Center at 2955 Hwy 44 in Marianna, AR.
 - a. Both offices are open Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays.
 - b. Office hours are 7:30 am to 4:00 pm at the Sylamore Ranger District office and 8:00 am to 4:30 pm at the St. Francis National Forest's District office.
4. Faxed comments should be sent to my attention at (870) 269-3000.

I will consider all comments that I receive. If new, substantive information regarding the impacts of implementing the Proposed Action is identified, additional action alternatives may still be developed. If I determine additional action alternatives should be developed, the EA will be amended and an additional opportunity to comment on the amended analysis will be provided. All comments received will be considered part of the public record. Those who provide written comments and provide valid contact information will be notified when a decision is made or if an additional opportunity to comment is designated.

I encourage you to contact me if you have any questions about this project. Your thoughts are important to me, and I look forward to hearing from you. To have a hard copy of the EA mailed to you, please contact District NEPA Coordinator, Jan Franks, at 870-269-3228, extension 3234.

Thank you for your interest in the management of the St. Francis National Forest.

Sincerely,



JIM MCCOY, District Ranger

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